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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 005856

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, WHA/OAS

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TAGS: PREL KSUM KCOR KHIV ETRD SCUL XL XM DR

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: OAS AMB. MAISTO ADDRESSES FREE TRADE, ANTI-CORRUPTION, EDUCATION, HIV/AIDS, DEMOCRACY

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 5468

1B. SANTO DOMINGO 5242

1C. SANTO DOMINGO 5156

11. (U) U.S. PermRep to the OAS Ambassador John Maisto, emphasized goals of the OAS Monterrey and Quebec Summits of the Americas in discussions with government, private sector, and NGO leaders and the media during his September 16-18 visit to Santo Domingo. He was accompanied by Ambassador Hertell, DCM Kubiske, USAID Director Brineman, and other Embassy staff.

Free Trade

12. (SBU) At a dinner with business leaders and a breakfast with American Chamber of Commerce members, Ambassador Maisto stressed the importance of achieving legislative ratification of the regional free trade agreement signed August 5. In this regard he outlined potential negative consequences of an anti-trade protectionist tax on fructose beverages which the Dominican Republic subsequently enacted (Ref A). He and the Ambassador stressed that this tax, if not removed, would kill chances for U.S. ratification and that the FTA negotiations could not be reopened. Most of the business leaders acknowledged this reality but still were looking for a way outside of the agreement to satisfy interests of the local sugar industry. The ambassadors also discussed this topic in a meeting with President Fernandez and Foreign Secretary Carlos Morales Troncoso (reported Ref B).

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Anti-Corruption

13. (U) Ambassador Maisto emphasized anti-corruption in an address at the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development (www.funiglode.org), attended by President Fernandez and Foreign Secretary Morales Troncoso and featured on national television news broadcasts; at a panel discussion at the MFA's Diplomatic School with Deputy Foreign Secretary Alejandra Liriano, other senior officials, and civil society leaders; at the AmCham breakfast; and in an exclusive full-page interview in leading circulation national daily "Listin Diario." Maisto noted that an OAS committee of experts next March will evaluate the Dominican Republic's progress in implementing the Inter-American Convention against Corruption and thanked the country for its active participation in this process. He stressed the corrosive effects of corruption on democratic institutions and on business confidence, citing the financial strains provoked by major bank fraud that was revealed here last year. He reiterated the Monterrey Summit commitments to deny refuge to perpetrators of corruption from any country and bring such persons to justice. The other leading dailies "El Caribe" and "Hoy" ran detailed stories on Maisto's anti-corruption message.

Education

14. (U) At a lunch at Ambassador Hertell's residence, with Sub-Secretary of Higher Education Victor Hugo de Lancer, Secretariat of Education curriculum director Dinorah de Lima,

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university administrators, and an advisor to the Centers for Education in Teacher Training (CETT) Presidential Initiative, the guests emphasized teacher training and improved educational quality and equity as goals. They cited particular needs such as English instruction at the elementary school level and training of math and science teachers. Ambassador Maisto urged them to place their educational priorities on the Dominican agenda for the next summit of the Americas.

HIV/AIDS

15. (SBU) Ambassador Maisto visited the Luis Eduardo Aybar Public Hospital, accompanied by Secretary of Health Dr. Sabino Baez Reyna, Presidential Commission for AIDS (COPRESIDA) executive director Dr. Alberto Fiallo, and hospital staff. He visited the integrated care unit and talked with outpatients who are living with AIDS. The visit left Embassy participants with the impression that this was a first contact with AIDS realities for many of the senior officials who met care providers and patients on the ward.

Democracy

16. (U) In the panel discussion at the Diplomatic School and in the press interview, Ambassador Maisto referred to the requirements for democracy laid out in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, going beyond free and fair elections to respect for human rights, combating poverty, strengthening democratic institutions, and promoting a democratic culture. At the dinner, he addressed the broad problems facing the country and how to strengthen democratic institutions. Business and AmCham leaders raised issues of rising crime (Ref C), social problems, justice system deficiencies, and civil society development.

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